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## DEFUNCT ETHNIC FEDERALISM, 'CLAMOR FOR STATEHOOD', VIOLENCE AND THE REMAPPING OF SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

**\*Tagel Wondimu and Yitagesu Bekele**

Department of Civics & Ethical Studies, Mizan-Tepi University

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\*Corresponding author: Tagel Wondimu,

### ABSTRACT

Contemporary, Ethiopia is razed with various civil resistance, street blocked and small scale conflicts, all in all chaos form every corners of the country. Some of the conflicts are due to the recent national political reform introduced by the current Ethiopian prime minister, as it is seen in the case of Somali and Oromi areginal States. Others are due to path-dependent questions for equitable economic benefit, the demand for state infrastructure and actual state somatic presence. While the remaining dozens of the latest questions in Ethiopia and the southern fringes in particular are related with 'clamor' for Woreda, Zone and Regional Statehood. Put together, from exploratory case study of the devolved Benc'-Maji Zone (BMZ), this article, identified Ethiopian federalism in general and its practice in the southern fringes as a typical example of defunct federalism. Besides, the article identified this defunct federalism partly causing unmanageable 'ill-timed' demand for statehood accompanied by various degrees of violence and the subsequent remapping of the SNNPR regional state of Ethiopia in general and Southwestern fringe of Ethiopia in particular. Thus, the article recommends policy makers to be critical in dealing with the remolding old and emerging new conflicts and strategically designed somatic state presence on the other, as far as, conflict transformation through state reform is concerned.

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### INTRODUCTION

Africa is stuck in range of intra-to interstate conflicts (Nhema, 2004). "The nature and sources of (such) conflicts within the continent include the fragile nature of African states, endemic poverty, economic inequality and exclusionary government system that contradict participatory political arrangement" (Ibid: 11). In terms of region, "the horn of Africa is one of the most conflict ravaged area on the continent; it is [also] well known ...of being volatile, hostile and poor place..." (Muhabie Mekonnen Mengistu, 2015, p. 28). In Short published and unpublished academic works tell us that, the prevalence of webs of conflicts, which includes local, national, regional and global conflicts sort, subverts the region (Williams, 2011). Based on Williams, explanation local conflicts are conflicts that erupt due, relations between individuals and their immediate (sub-state) politico-geographic context; whereas national conflicts are seen as conflicts that are focused on the institutions of state power, geographically coherent. When it comes to regional conflicts, Williams tells us that such

conflicts of the horn align with the so called sub-global security complex's which involves agents of at least two states. The last but not least conflict typology is global, which they are de-territorialized networks, structures, process, institutions or belief system, with the potential to be global in scope. Regardless of soundness of the aforementioned classification developed by Williams there are also sub categorization on one side and different version of classing conflicts in continent, yet it is beyond the scope of the article. In simple terms, this article is focused on intra state conflicts within the horn of Africa through special focus on Ethiopia. To that end, the epicenter of the article is embedded on the nexus between defunct ethnic federalism, 'clamor for statehood', violence and the remapping of southern Ethiopia, such are contemporary conflicts within the state partly caused by national political reform and partly due to path dependent greed vis-à-vis grievance induced confrontations. Based the prevailing scholarships state reform and conflict are closely interlinked both with conflict transformation and that of conflicts detonation. On the one hand, state reform serves as a means for conflict transformation and as a linchpin of sustainable peace on the other, state reform

by itself, can also easily become a bone of contestation and source of conflicts (Bachler, NY). With such insight the paper will critically explore the association between federal failure, state reform and the subsequent conflicts in Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Region (SNNPR) in general and Benc'Maji Zone (BMZ) in particular. Ethiopia is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country (Lubo Teferi, 2012). Due to numerous conflicts the Ethiopian empire has gone through earth-shaking political changes three times<sup>1</sup> within the last three decades. Based on Hamdesa's observation, during these three epochs, three different regimes have occupied the pinnacles of power, each one dominated by a particular ethnic group, each proclaiming radically variant ideologies—all the three promising unity, social justice and economic development and progress for all (Hamdesa Tusso, 1997). In addition to Hamdesa's observation, seeing the coming of Abiy Ahmed (PhD)<sup>2</sup> a vibrant OPEDO in 2018, one could possibly add the fourth earth-shaking political reform in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, all these changes including the fourth witnessed numerous intra-state conflicts. Of these changes in the 1990s, Ethiopia experienced a major turning point in the area of national politics. During this epoch in an attempt to introduce a radical reorganization of state structures and state-society relations, the ruling regime has constitutionally formalized ethnicity as a fundamental principle of political organizations (Asnake Kefale, 2004). According to (Yonas Adaye, 2016) the institutionalization of ethnicity and ethnic federalism is seen by the government as 'panacea for the then ethno-national conflicts'. Nevertheless, the 27 balance sheet tells us that the 'promising' ethnic federalism directly or indirectly generating three typologies of conflicts: these are inter-ethnic competitions and conflicts in multiple identity regional states, tensions in majority-minority relations and thirdly problems relating to delineation of regional boundaries (Asnake Kefale, 2004). Due to this the country witnessed numerous conflicts and confrontations including the 2015-2018, Qeerroo, Fano, Zerma, Egeto, and Woro movements. Of all Qeerroo movements brought Abiy Ahmed (PhD) and the auspicious national political reform. Sadly the reform itself again remodeled old and generated new variants of conflicts. With such insight this paper is about this new species of conflicts in SNNPR in general and BMZ in particular.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

This paper is qualitative research based on six selected clamors for Zone *Woreda* and regional statehood since the coming of the new Ethiopian PM, Abiy Ahmed (PhD). The data for this inquiry were collected from secondary sources such as books, articles, legal documents and that of online newspapers published following the clamor for *Woreda*, Zone and regional statehood mainly in SNNPR. To investigate the nexus between defunct Ethnic Federalism, 'Clamor for Statehood', Violence and the Remapping of Southern Ethiopia constructivists' view point was used. With such insight the paper has tried to investigate the nexus between defunct federalism and emerging

'ill-timed' *Woreda*, zonal and regional statehood claims and their subsequent implication on ethnic conflicts and that of the remapping process of southwestern Ethiopian, particularly the collapsing Benc'Maji Zone (BMZ).

### Federalism and conflict: Ethiopian focus

Multi-ethnic states have historically used different approaches, while preventing and managing ethnic conflicts (Asnake, 2004). For instance McGarry and O'Leary identified four specific methods belonging to each of the two categories. The specific methods for conflict elimination (through eliminating differences) include a) genocide, (b) forced mass population transfers, c) partition or secession and d) integration or assimilation. The second category, which conflict management (through managing differences) consists of a) hegemonic control, (b) arbitration, (c) federalism, and (d) power sharing (McGarry and O'Leary 1993, quoted in Asnake, 2004:52). Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic state adopted federalism from the second category. Yet, Ethiopian 27 years' federal balance sheet tells us that Ethiopian federalism is defunct or federal failure (Asnake, 2004, Lubo Teferi, 2012, Hamdesa Tusso, 1997 and Markakis 2004). The next sections and subsections are dedicated to explicate what makes Ethiopian ethnic federalism defunct?

**Conflict implication of defunct federalism:** Naming political parties, public institutions, governments and governance systems is a serious matter (Mulugeta Gebrehiwot and Fiseha Haftetsion, 2015). That being said about naming in general and the politics of naming in particular, their article argues that Ethiopian federalism as 'Multiethnic federalism'. Contrary to their observation Asnake (2004) asserts Ethiopian federalism to be ethnic federalism, which is an axiom shared by (Merara Gudina, 2004); Hitherto, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot and Fiseha Haftetsion (2015) strongly claim that Ethiopian federalism as 'multi-ethnic federalism'. Putting aside the politics of naming Ethiopian federalism, this section argues Ethiopian federalism as defunct federalism. To begin with it is vital to understand the meaning and concept of federal failure or defunct federalisms. Historically speaking one of the pioneers of the comparative study of defunct federalism, Thomas Franck (Frank 1968 cited in (Kavalski and Zolkos, 1988) noted the difficulty in establishing a 'common terminology' in assessing the phenomenon of failure, yet they use Franck (1968) and Hicks (1978) conceptualization of federal failure. According to Franck (1968) the case of federal failure discloses a historical fact of 'non-achievement of the necessary conditions for survival of a federation'. In the similar vein Hicks (1978: 9) posits that if the objective of federalism is 'to establish and maintain a polity where government by the people produces one and the same time a strong self-conscious national organization and also keeps intact the rights and cultures of the unites as enshrined in the constitution, then any deviation from such, a polity must be accounted as federal failure' Hicks (1978) although exposing the bearing of 'failure' on the study of federalism, such definitions fall short of delineating its relevance to the critical appraisal of defunct federalisms. With such insight the paper argues that Ethiopian federalism as defunct or failed federalism. The reason behind such argument is built upon the following four ingredients: these are

- I. Ethiopian federalism failed to respond nationality questions

<sup>1</sup> Sensing political changes with the coming of Dr. Abiy Ahmed one could half-heartedly add the fourth earth-shaking political change in Ethiopia.

<sup>2</sup> "In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed [PhD] has initiated ground breaking reforms across most every areas of Ethiopian Society becoming prime Minister on April 2, 2018. He deserves tremendous credit for his boldness in tackling issues that previous governments have not addressed ..." Statement by Assistant Secretary Tibor Nagy, Bureau of African Affairs "U.S. National Interests in Developments in Ethiopia" / also available at <https://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/rm/2018/index.htm> /

- II. It failed to manage ethnic conflicts, which it aimed to manage, if not resolve
- III. Two decades practice of it has triggered 'ill-timed' clamors for regional statehood
- IV. It is precipitating the remapping Ethiopia on one side and on the verge of remapping southwest Ethiopia, on the other

In glimpse of these four empirical situations this article asserts Ethiopian federalism as defunct federalism. Having these points in mind, the following subsections will provide critical explanation on these four issues, which intern will enrich subsequent topics and sub-topics.

#### **Ethiopian federalism and ethno-national questions:**

According to Lobo Teferi (2012) one of the primary agendas of EPRDF was addressing inter-ethnic conflicts. With such insight the incumbent government, through its primary agenda addressing inter-ethnic-conflicts in the country recognized Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples unconditional rights to self-determination up to secession. Yet, this constitutionally enshrined right caused more problem than solutions. According to Aklilu Abrham (2000) quoted in Merara Gudina (2004:259) "the hegemonic aspiration of the Tigrian elites and the local need for self-administration failed go together because, genuine decentralization of power demands genuine empowerment of the varied 'Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' of Ethiopia". This in turn leads us to Kavalski and Zolkos federal failure, hypothesis 1. Kavalski and Zolkos (1988) federal failure, hypothesis 1, tells us that, "if federalism doesn't conform the rules of liberal democracy it fails". With such insight Ethiopian federalism is failed because it failed to uphold liberal democracy. In addition to this Ethiopia adopted federalism to manage, if possible to solve ethno national questions that razed the country for half a century. Nevertheless the institutionalization of ethnic federalism partly mushroomed ethnic conflicts of which Asnake Kefele (2004) identified the silte vis-vis Gurage identity Question, the WOGAGODA and resistance of Wolayita, Sheko vis-à-vis Majang conflict of administrative structure and tritory, Bertavis-à-vis Gumuz confrontation in Benishangul-gumuz Reginal State, tension on the status of Hawassa Town between Sidama and that of SNNPR authorities. Dispite, the initial initiative to deal with such and related issues, the institutionalization process ethnicized almost all issues. This in turn multiplied inter and intra-ethnic conflicts. In relation to this conclusion one could see December 26/2011 E.C [December 2019 GC] Human Rights Council report entitled: "A Statement on the Current State of Our Country Seeks to Find a Lasting Solution to the Ongoing Conflict in Various Parts of the Country" Asserts that:

*"...it is remembered that the Human Rights Council has repeatedly urged the concerned authorities to provide a lasting and irrefutable solution to the problems that arise in various areas of our country [Ethiopia], especially those who are directly or indirectly responsible for the violence. However, complaints and reports from various areas of the country indicate that conflicts and attacks continue to escalate in different areas. Since October, 2011 E.C [October 2019], human lives, injuries, property damage, displacement and various injuries have occurred and are still occurring in different parts of the country..."*

Overall the report outlined numerous conflict episodes encompassing two or more ethnic groups in conflict for

example in Oromia regional state conflict incidents in Moyale area, Buli-Hora University, in SNNPR Region Gurage vis-à-vis Maskan and Marako, in Beneshangul Regional state natives vis-à-vis Amhara and Oromo settlers skirmishes were mentioned. Based Human Rights Council Report (2019) on one side and Hicks (1978) conceptualization of federal failure, the article counts Ethiopia as federal failure. In plain words, "if federalism deviates from what it promised within the federal constitution, then with such deviation the polity must be accounted as federal failure" (Hicks (1978: 9), for our case Ethiopian federalism via its the 1995 constitution promised peace, yet one way or the other produced the aforementioned violence. Above all, emerging new and changing old conflicts due to federalization process in Ethiopia are three in type. These are "inter-ethnic competition and conflicts in multiple identity regional states, tension in Majority-minority relations and problems relating to delineation of regional boundaries (Asnake Kefale, 2004: 55). In addition to Asnake's categorization, seeing the mushrooming *Woreda*, *Zonal* and *Regional* statehood clamors and the subsequent conflicts in SNNPR in general and BMZ in particular could be taken as the fourth conflict variants that razed the country because of weakening federal covenant.

#### **Remapping Ethiopia and SNNPR: Past and Present:**

Since the 1970, three political organizations have played major roles in remapping Ethiopia (Donham, 2002 and Lubo, 1997). According to these two works, the provincial military administrative council or 'Derg' latter giving rise to the workers party of Ethiopia (WPE); the Tigrian People Liberation Front (TPLF) latter which take the leading role in forming the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF). During these three decades, three different regimes have occupied the pinnacles of power, each one dominated by a particular ethnic group, each proclaiming radically variant ideologies—all the three promising unity, Social justice and Economic development and progress for all (Hamdesa Tusso, 1997). As to (Donham, 2002) the two key moments during these epoch, Ethiopia get through a remapping process in 1974 and 1991 G.C. Donham further goes to assert that each of these two moments whitened reformatory movement with concealed long term continuities of significance. For example after the 1974 the Derg took over the old imperial and orthodox Christian project of unification and controlling the peripheries. In the same vein the 1991, following the WPE disintegration, TPLF and EPLF assumed the pinnacle of state power remapped Ethiopia on the reverse side of the revolutionary 'Derg' through institutionalizing ethnicity and ethnic federalism. Yet, 27 years balance sheet reveals that it partly, if not in some areas fully caused ethnic conflicts on one side the precipitated the fourth round remapping Ethiopia which by Abiy Ahmed (PhD). To this end it could be vital to quote and alkalized (Gardner, 2018).

Following Oromo, a wave of a protest and strikes that brought the [Ethiopian] economy to a near standstill, in February [2018], [the] then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, and a state of emergency was declared by the federal government. Abiy Ahmed (PhD), as the recently appointed chairman of the Oromo wing of the EPRDF, a multiethnic coalition, put his name forward. He was young and popular with the demonstrators, and he echoed many of their demands, including for the release of political prisoners. But a section of the EPRDF

establishment—centered in its ethnic Tigrayan wing, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—dismissed him and his Oromo colleague Lemma Megersa as reckless populists and fought tooth and nail to obstruct his candidacy. They failed.

Similarly, Zemelak Ayitenew (2018:1) a renowned expert in federalism and federal studies asserts that “with the ascendance to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD), Ethiopia is undergoing unprecedented political transformation”. Yet the reform could be taken as the forth earth shaking movement on one side continuation of the remapping of Ethiopia in general and SNNPR in particular. As an indication following national political reform at federal levels within SNNPR, Sidama, Kaffa, Gurage Zonal and Benc' Maji Zone councils among others voted to succeed from their mother constituent unit SNNPR. Above and beyond each of these 'ill-timed' clamors charted by conflicts and casualties (HRC special report, 2019). To add one more point two zones of SNNPRS devolved in to two; these are Gamo Gofas Zone into Gamo Zone and Goffa Zone on one side and Benc' Maji Zone devolved into Benc' Sheko Zone and that of West Omo Zone. Equally Sidama Zone has gone through referendum to disaffiliate from SNNPRS all these implies federal failure.

**Defunct federalism, clamor for statehood & Conflicts in SNNPRS:** Based on published and unpublished materials used for this study on one side and researchers day to day experience within contemporary SNNPRS, the article identified that, federal failure and clamor for statehood due to the recent national political reform within Ethiopia added on the prevailing rampant bad governance, conflicts is being instigated with the subsequent effect of geographic remapping of southwestern part of the country. Anatomy of such defunct federalism, clamor for statehood (quest for *Woreda*, Zone and that of *Kilil*) and the subsequent conflict to apprehend this demands within the country in general and southern part of the country in particular perfectly flare-ups with Kavalski and Zolkos (1988) definition of defunct federalism. Moreover proto type of defunct federalism is clearly seen from devolved Benc'-Maji Zone into Benc'-Sheko Zone and West Omo Zone on one side and the devolution of Gamo Gofa Zone into Gamo and Goffa Zones on the other. Equally, the amalgamation of the aforementioned issues enabled Hawasa city referendum that assured constituency members preference for Sidama disaffiliation from SNNPRS. Similarly, Wolita, Kaffa, Silte, Gedeo, Dawuro and the former Benc'-Maji Zones from others have consistently voted to disaffiliate from SNNPRS (Eshete Bekele and Hirut Melese, 2019; Zemelak Ayitenew, 2018 ). With these regard , among the many political elites Hailemichael Lemma who is Deputy Chairperson of Wolayita National Movement , rightly believes that, like Wolayita and Sidama Zones, other Zones within SNNPRS are clamoring Statehood, due to such pattern the region is being 'torn down' (Eshete Bekele and Hirut Melese, 2019). Above all, Sidama secured referendum through violent confrontation both with regional and federal government soldiers on one side and Howassa city dwellers on the other .Following bloody destructions movers and shakers of Sidama statehood advocates become victories, to secure majority vote so as to depart from SNNPRS (Kiruga, 2019). In glimpse of Sidama successes, if the remaining dozens of Zones within the region apply Sidama approach for departure, then SNNPS will host two events: bloody ethnic conflict and further geographically remapping and the subsequent dissolution of the region.

**Lesson Learned Caveats**As we have seen in the above Discussions, State reform can be used as a viable mechanism to transform conflicts on one side and state reform by itself may turn cordial relations into competitive and confrontational, if not violent clashes. As we have seen in this article, during the 1970s state reform turned Ethiopia from feudal to socialism. As a reform and remapping process, it didn't last long following the 1970s and 1980s TPLF and EPLF confrontation with the central government, which ousted the 'Derg' regime. Following the collapse of 'Derg', EPLF and TPLF, remapped Ethiopia both in terms of political map and that of ideology. As indicated within this article, the 1990s reforms Ethiopia lost one of her constitutes unite, that is Eritria. In terms of ideological remapping Ethiopia led by TPLF/EPRDF institutionalized ethnicity and Ethnic federalism, so as to deal with the then ethno-national conflicts and that of identity questions. Yet , after 27 years of institutionalizing Ethnic federalism, ethno-national conflicts and identity questions increased in the country, perfectly fitting federal failure hypothesis formulas developed by Kavalski and Zolkos (1988). In terms of regional coverage federal failure boldly is seen in SNNPR, according to key informants SNNPR is a constituent unit of Ethiopian federalism that may disintegrate sooner or later. Based on the on official sources Sidama, Guraghe, Kaffa, Gamo and Benc'-Maji Zone councils , have unanimously resolved to disaffiliate from this constituent unit of Ethiopian federalism and establishes their own statehood on one side each of this zones have experienced various local and localized conflicts and violence. These local and localized conflicts has resulted both material and human casualties. Off the prevailing Zones of SNNPR, Benc'-Maji Zone is experience federal failure, with such failure and subsequent conflicts we may no longer see a zonal administration entitled BMZ. In simple terms, BMZ devolved by now. All that being said, academicians, politicians and that of researches has to be too critical while proposing any sort of state reform, for mere fact that it is double-edged sword. Generally the 1974 reform by 'Derg', the 1991 reform by TPLF led EPRDF and in 2018 reform led by current Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed (PhD), has come up with political reform and subsequent conflicts. Hitherto with sort of variations all of these national reforms brought conflicts and clamors. Hence, despite the fact that state /political reform is needed and a must for states like Ethiopia, states reformers have to be critical for what will follow the reform as far as, conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation are concerned.

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